

**1988 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS**

**BY GOVERNOR NED McWHERTER**

Governor Wilder, Speaker Murray, members of the General Assembly, members of the judiciary, constitutional officers, fellow Tennesseans:

I have just completed my first year as your governor. I begin by thanking the General Assembly and the people of Tennessee for the support you have given me over the last twelve months.

For 200 years in Tennessee, it has been our tradition that a new chief executive is given adequate time to organize the government and define his agenda. You have given me this time and for that I am grateful.

On the occasion of my first State of the State Address, it is appropriate that I share with this body my goals and priorities for our administration.

In many ways, my philosophy of government is the product of serving eighteen years in the General Assembly. As governor, my notions of compromise, of balanced budgets, of bipartisan cooperation, come from my experiences with many of the men and women here today.

At the same time, my decisions about where I want Tennessee to be at the turn of the century were put into focus by two experiences during my first year as governor.

From June to September, I took state government on a listening tour directly to the people of Tennessee. The purpose was simple. Time after time, I have told my staff and commissioners that they will never know what I call the "real Tennessee" unless they get out of those big offices and get on the street.

Nine separate times we went on the road with every commissioner of every state agency. We conducted more than 2,400 events in every county and hundreds of communities. I personally went into Human Services offices and the Department of Transportation garages. I toured our mental health facilities. I walked the cell blocks of our prisons.

We held nine open cabinet meetings, where any Tennessean could talk to the governor or a commissioner face-to-face with a problem or suggestion. After each cabinet meeting we had a reception to thank our state employees for the good job they do.

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The response from the communities of Tennessee was far beyond anything we imagined. In the courthouse squares, in the elementary schools, in the stockyards, in the VFW halls, they came by the thousands. They came from every walk of life -- business leaders, workers, local officials and housewives. For four months, we listened and we learned.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe as we sit here today, your state government has seen and heard the "real Tennessee."

Our commissioner of Mental Health and Mental Retardation is from Memphis, but he has walked the halls and eaten with the staff of the Greene Valley Center in Upper East Tennessee. Our commissioner of Financial Institutions is from the Tri-Cities, but he is the first commissioner in memory to walk into many of the small banks along the Mississippi River.

We have seen the need for better housing in Chattanooga. But we also know what it's like to live in Brownsville in August with no air conditioning and no running water.

We saw the struggle of the black community to provide day care in a small church in Jackson. And we saw the same struggle of a lady who runs a day care center in the coal fields of Claiborne County.

Out on the street, the issues become human. No amount of prison consultants can equal what you see in the eyes of a man who has lived in Brushy Mountain for 14 years. No elected official speaks with the power of the lady in the Memphis cabinet meeting who was deaf and blind.

Many of my goals that I discussed during the campaign were reinforced by what I saw and heard this year on the streets of Tennessee. The remainder were put into focus by what I saw and heard 10,000 miles away.

In October, I traveled to Japan, Korea and the Republic of China in search of investment opportunities and markets for Tennessee products. I met with foreign trade ministers and corporate leaders in each country. Sometimes I spoke as governor. Other times I spoke to them as a businessman in language they understood.

I returned from the Far East with a single impression. If raising our standard of living is to ever be more than a dream, Tennessee must be prepared to compete worldwide.

Many of the shirt factories that have left Tennessee over the last decade can be found in the streets of Seoul and Taipei. Manufacturing jobs that once were the backbone of Tennessee communities today are located in Tokyo and Osaka.

We are in the middle of an economic struggle that will decide the fate of a generation of Tennesseans. In recent months, financial markets around the world have told us that our choice is clear. We can choose to do everything we can to compete. Or we can choose to do nothing and let our economic wealth hemorrhage away.

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Our trip to the Far East already has resulted in the second largest Japanese plant ever to locate in Tennessee. Other nations such as Sweden, Canada and the Netherlands have announced large investments in the last six months.

Last week, I met with the leadership of Memphis and officers of the Kellogg Corporation to discuss what would be the second largest investment in Tennessee history.

My responsibility as your governor, and the top priority of this administration, will be to ensure that our children have the same opportunity for prosperity as we have enjoyed.

Today's first graders will enter the job market in the year 2000. Their chance to compete successfully in the world economy and their chance for a better life depends directly upon the decisions we make.

In the initiatives of this administration during the next three years, and in the proposals I will bring to the legislature for your consideration, our children will come first.

For our children to receive adequate training, it is critical that we pay competitive salaries in order to hire enough qualified teachers. This year I will recommend the first major step to achieve a minimum starting salary of \$18,500 for our teachers.

There are other areas in education that we must address if we want our children to compete in the world economy. We must reduce our state's high rate of illiteracy. Our students must continue to improve their skills in math and we must place more emphasis on science and languages.

In higher education, we must expand the Chairs of Excellence program to attract more of the nation's leaders in research to Tennessee. We must update our research equipment. And we must provide more scholarships to our brightest students to keep them in Tennessee.

All of the money we spend on education will be wasted if we do not address the drug and alcohol problem found on our playgrounds and in our neighborhoods.

This year, I began a program called The Governor's Alliance for a Drug Free Tennessee. The program is Tennessee's first comprehensive community approach designed to provide our children with drug and alcohol education, treatment for abuse and a crackdown on drug dealers.

During the past 12 months, we worked overtime to develop a plan for our adult corrections system. The plan is now in place and \$136 million in construction projects are now going to bid.

It is now time to devote some attention to our juvenile corrections system. In a few weeks I will ask the legislature to join me in implementing a plan to improve programs and facilities for our juveniles.

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During the next three years, we will undertake a number of initiatives that will focus on the future that will be there for our children in the year 2000.

I would like to improve health care for pregnant mothers and expand Medicaid coverage for poor children up to age five.

I hope to join with the legislature in developing more day care opportunities for Tennessee's working parents.

And I am committed to new approaches that will provide affordable housing to more of Tennessee's young families.

These goals are important to building the kind of Tennessee we want for our children at the turn of the century. But whether we succeed in any of these goals depends directly upon our ability to provide a long range plan to bring more and better jobs to Tennessee. It will not be enough in the future for state government to merely recruit new industries.

My goal is a 95 county jobs plan that will lay the groundwork for economic development next year and into the next century. I will ask the legislature to appropriate \$50 million that will help us implement the plan so we can provide job opportunities for all Tennesseans -- urban and rural.

In roads, in education and in technology, my goal for the year 2000 is nothing less than a Tennessee that can compete for jobs -- not only with any state in the country, but with any nation in the world.

In closing, I would emphasize that together we will face other issues during the next three years. Our elderly must have affordable health care. We will need to continue our road program and work to reduce our production of hazardous wastes. And we must see that future revenues are not drained by our prisons.

But we must never lose sight of our ultimate responsibility -- to provide our children with a future as bright as the one we enjoy today.

That is the message I bring to you from the "real Tennessee."

If we are responsible and reasonable -- and if we can hold down the cost of government -- the people of this state will support what needs to be done.

Since I last spoke with you, I have visited every county in this great state. One year later I can still say with confidence that in Tennessee, the best is yet to come.

Thank you.

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Mr. President Wilder relinquished the gavel to Mr. Speaker Murray, as President of the Joint Convention.

Thereupon, the purpose for which the Joint Convention was called having been accomplished, Mr. President Murray declared the Joint Convention dissolved.